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Chairman:	Mr. Majoor	(Netherlands)
later:	Ms. Seanedzu (Vice-Chairman)	(Ghana)
later:	Mr. Majoor	(Netherlands)

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The meeting was called to order at 3.15 p.m.

Agenda item 39: Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, questions relating to refugees, returnees and displaced persons and humanitarian questions (A/63/12, A/63/12/Add.1 and A/63/321)

1. **Mr. Guterres** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)), introducing his report (A/63/12), gave a brief overview of the main developments in protection, assistance and the search for lasting solutions for refugees, displaced and stateless persons and other UNHCR beneficiaries, whose number had significantly increased over the 18-month reporting period. In light of those developments, the High Commissioner had been committed to pursuing the UNHCR management reform process initiated in 2006, which was aimed at enabling the Agency to better meet beneficiaries' needs by releasing additional resources for operational activities and reducing administrative costs. In that regard, he had decided that the work of UNCHR would focus on four key actions: redirecting resources and energy to the field, decentralization and regionalization, achieving and demonstrating results and, lastly, undertaking human resources reforms. In that regard, a learning centre had recently been established in Budapest. Referring to the "Delivering as One" initiative, he noted that UNHCR and the Department of Peacekeeping Operations had recently decided to strengthen their cooperation.

2. He expressed the hope that the global financial crisis would not place a burden on the Agency's budget, which was already insufficient to meet the basic needs of its beneficiaries. He stressed the need to find new solutions for managing environmental and humanitarian crises, raise the standards and delivery of protection for displaced people and reconsider the traditional principles and architecture of humanitarian action, in light of newer concepts such as human security and the responsibility to protect.

3. Lastly, the noted that if the international community failed to meet the needs of the world's poor, it could only expect more social and political turmoil in the years to come. He hoped that he could count on the wisdom of Member States and trusted that they would choose to invest in protection for the most vulnerable, as a matter of self-interest.

4. **Mr. Shingiro** (Burundi), referring to paragraph 49 of the High Commissioner's report, asked for information about the countries that had announced that they would undertake resettlement and wondered why European Union member States were only offering 6 per cent of all resettlement places available worldwide. Turning to paragraph 53, he sought more information about the causes of the long resettlement request processing time, the problems encountered in that regard and the strategies adopted to address the situation.

5. **Mr. Khoshnaw** (Iraq) noted that many Iraqis who had sought asylum abroad were beginning to return home, indicating that his Government's efforts to achieve stability, in cooperation with the international community, were paying off. His Government would continue to cooperate with UNHCR.

6. **Mr. Al-Shami** (Yemen), noting that his Government was committed to cooperating with UNHCR, sought the High Commissioner's views on the impact of the growing number of pirate attacks in the Red Sea region on the refugee situation.

7. **Mr. Saeed** (Sudan) commended the High Commissioner for his efforts, to secure resources and reduce administrative costs in the context of reforms undertaken by UNHCR in 2006, and wanted to know the results of those efforts. Referring to the figures cited in the High Commissioner's report, he wondered how they had been calculated and whether the States concerned had been involved in the process, noting that the figures, particularly those relating to the repatriation of refugees in Africa, appeared to be exaggerated.

8. **Ms. Bhoroma** (Zimbabwe), commenting on paragraphs 31 to 33 of the chapter on Southern Africa of the report of the Secretary-General on assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa (A/63/321), said that the emigration of Zimbabweans to South Africa had begun well over a century earlier, following the discovery of gold in that country. Several regional legal instruments provided for human migration, including the treaty establishing the South African Development Community, one of the objectives of which was sustainable economic development based on the collective autonomy and the interdependence of its members, as well as the maximization of productive employment and the use of the region's human and material resources. The

Community had also adopted a free trade agreement in 1996 providing for the free movement of goods and services and, in 2005, a protocol to facilitate the movement of persons. Since South Africa had a flourishing economy, it naturally attracted labour from other countries; that was not a merely African phenomenon, but a global one, already observed in Europe and the Americas.

9. While she did not deny the economic difficulties that Zimbabwe was experiencing as a result of the unilateral economic sanctions, nor the country's current political problems, of which most members of the Third Committee were aware, she strongly objected to the half-truths and biased information that the Secretariat had presented in its report (A/63/321) for political purposes. Insinuating that the migration of Zimbabweans to South Africa had sparked the xenophobic violence in that country was a political conclusion that did not help to resolve that particular problem. It was regrettable that, of all the African countries whose nationals had been victims of the xenophobic attacks, the report had only singled out Zimbabwe. Politicizing xenophobic attacks was a violation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. The Secretariat should abstain from drawing its own conclusions and presenting them as facts in reports of the United Nations without consulting the Member States concerned. She thanked the South African Government for its assistance to all the victims of those sad events.

10. **Mr. Attiya** (Egypt) said that, according to the report (A/63/12), there were 11.4 million refugees worldwide and 52 million displaced persons, of whom 26 million had been displaced for conflict-related reasons and the other 26 million by natural disasters; however, the report only referred to the work of UNHCR in response to the needs of 31.7 million people. The figures presented in the report did not tally with the information in the tables.

11. He wondered why the number of refugees of concern to UNHCR was not clearly indicated. In addition, the report made no distinction between the approximately 730,000 returned refugees, shown in table 1, and the total of 2.8 million refugees, displaced persons and people in refugee-like situations, who had returned home. Furthermore, the report did not indicate how many of the approximately 730,000 returned refugees had received assistance from UNHCR pursuant to its mandate. UNHCR should explain the meaning of the terms "refugees" and "people in refugee-like situations" and explain why the report referred to 11.4 million refugees in the world, while, according to the figures in the table, there were only 9.5 million.

12. **Ms. Mballa Eyenga** (Cameroon) noted the pressure that the refugee situation placed on the United Nations system and host countries. Cameroon was proud to be a host country and country of asylum, but had been obliged to overcome the pressures on its capacity to respond to the needs of the refugees on its territory. The presence of refugees within its borders also caused security problems, including the circulation of weapons controlled by members of armed groups that had infiltrated into its territory. Since the issue of refugees was a collective challenge, the international community should acknowledge the need to share responsibilities.

13. **Mr. Guterres** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that Burundi was to be commended on the significant numbers of Burundian refugees who had returned home in 2007 and 2008. The Burundian Government and people, UNHCR and international organizations had made an enormous effort to guarantee a harmonious process in that country, which was under tremendous population pressure.

14. Regarding resettlement in a third country, the United States of America, Australia and Canada had a long tradition in that regard. Refugees were usually resettled in developed countries, as a way of sharing responsibilities with first-asylum countries. In the case of Europe, rather than resettlement, hundreds of thousands of asylum-seekers arrived directly at the borders of some European countries. However, Europe had recently adopted a resettlement quota system, which UNHCR strongly encouraged, because resettlement was very important in situations of vulnerability and when refugees were used as a strategic weapon. Norway, Sweden, Denmark, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Portugal had established standing quotas and other countries, such as France and Spain, were considering following their example.

15. The significant slowdown in resettlement procedures had been caused by security-related problems. The quality of the applications submitted by

UNHCR was a factor that would speed up procedures. He welcomed the tremendous generosity of some countries, which had agreed to establish emergency resettlement programmes for refugees in a particularly vulnerable situation, and thanked Romania, which had agreed to establish a transit centre for cases where the processing time was incompatible with the requirements of the first-asylum country. He also commended the efforts made by Brazil, which accepted emergency resettlements within 72 hours and hoped that such procedures could be applied in other cases.

16. Responding to the representative of Iraq, he said that, the previous summer, 10,000 displaced persons had returned home, and that had raised the crucial issue of the return of property and the payment of compensation in the many cases where it was not possible to return such property. Nevertheless, the return of Iraqis from abroad was still proceeding very slowly.

17. The security situation in Iraq had improved, but continued intensive cooperation was needed to ensure that returns were successful and sustainable. It was extremely important for States not to return refugees to Iraq against their will; rather they should prepare their return in an orderly manner when the security situation improved.

18. He welcomed the fact that Yemen had agreed to grant prima facie refugee status to all Somalis who landed on the Yemeni coast. Piracy endangered the lives of refugees who tried to cross the Gulf of Aden; the activities of smugglers and traffickers also had an enormous impact. For example, during a recent visit to Yemen, he had observed that, in 2008, three times more people had tried to cross the Gulf of Aden than in 2007, and, 400 people had drowned during the crossing in tragic circumstances. The international community must take tougher action against traffickers and smugglers at sea. Aware that the programme for Yemen received very little support compared with the needs, UNCHR was trying to divert as much resources as possible from internal savings and had considerably upgraded that programme.

19. Responding to the comment made by the representative of the Sudan, he said that the savings made through the internal reform of the Office had had two significant effects on the implementation of its programme in the Sudan. The Office had upgraded its presence in Eastern Sudan, which had been hosting a large number of Eritreans for decades. The programme in Eastern Sudan would be one of the five cases of refugees in protracted situations, to which UNHCR would call the international community's attention in December 2008 during the next dialogue on the challenges of protection. In 2007 and 2008, UNHCR had also been able to enhance its programme of assistance for the return of refugees to Southern Sudan, which had been seriously affected by a shortage of resources in 2005 and 2006. Even though the conditions of reintegration would be very complicated, refugees would soon be able to return to Southern Sudan.

20. The bulk of the figures provided by UNHCR were drawn from national statistics; the figures for resettlement were accurate because they were based on the individual submissions presented by UNHCR; the figures for departures were also accurate because they had been checked by the countries of first asylum; and the figures for refugees in general were for the most part based on statistics provided by the host country.

21. Responding to the comments of the representative of Zimbabwe on the report of the Secretary-General (A/63/321), he said that although he could not speak for the Secretary-General, his Office had observed a sustained and massive migration of Zimbabweans, about three million of whom were said to have left their country. The majority of the Zimbabweans who had crossed the border into South Africa were not refugees in the sense of the Convention but were fleeing their country, where the economic situation was desperate. There were also tens of thousands of Zimbabweans in South Africa who had requested asylum under the Convention, invoking violations of their fundamental rights. South Africa and other neighbouring countries had granted asylum to a great many of those seeking it. In South Africa, a State party to the 1951 Convention, it was not UNHCR but the national authorities who determined refugee status.

22. The report established no linkage between the xenophobic attacks in South Africa and the migration of Zimbabweans. It was nevertheless true that most of the victims — who had come from a number of countries — had been Zimbabweans, which could be explained by the fact that so many lived in South Africa.

23. The representative of Egypt should contact the New York office of UNHCR for detailed information

on the figures and the terminology used by UNHCR. The term "persons of concern to the High Commissioner" encompassed all refugees and asylum-seekers but only a part of displaced persons, namely, all those displaced as a result of conflicts and only those displaced by natural disasters occurring in countries where UNHCR already had sizeable programmes. Stateless persons were also persons of concern to the High Commissioner, and the Office in addition provided assistance to some repatriated persons immediately after their return. The term "persons in a refugee-like situation" referred to a limited number whom the host country did not recognize as refugees but who UNHCR believed did fit the definition of a refugee.

24. UNHCR did not assist all refugees and did not systematically provide direct assistance to the countries concerned. A large part of its activities aimed at raising awareness among industrialized countries of the need to protect the rights of asylum-seekers. He was aware that the support given to Egypt, among other countries, was insufficient. It was therefore incumbent on him to reduce the UNHCR headquarters expenditure as far as possible, including through outposting and staff reductions, so as to give more assistance to refugees.

25. Responding to the delegation of Cameroon, he said that he was aware that the impact of the presence of refugees had on Cameroonian society, but that one must distinguish between refugees, who had to receive assistance because they were victims, and armed bands, who were largely responsible for victimizing the refugees and who were not entitled to receive aid either from UNHCR or the host country. The international community must, indeed, share the responsibility for refugees, by using UNHCR and providing economic cooperation but also by resettling refugees in order to lighten the burden currently being borne by the countries of first asylum of the South.

26. **Ms. Tadesse** (Ethiopia) noted that, according to paragraph 11 of the report of the Secretary-General (A/63/321), international organizations estimated there were currently some 20,000 conflict-induced internally displaced persons, living mainly in Somali, Oromiya, Gambella and Tigray regional States. The High Commissioner should identify those international organizations. The report indicated that the persons in question had been displaced as a result of conflict, but it seemed to her delegation that in some cases the population displacements were due to other reasons.

27. **Ms. Bhoroma** (Zimbabwe), assuring the High Commissioner that she had not mistaken him for the Secretary-General, reiterated that it was unfortunate that paragraph 32 of the report of the Secretary-General dealt solely with Zimbabweans, when it was an established fact that there were no Zimbabweans emigrating to South Africa. She believed that the incidents in question had been politicized, and again took issue with paragraph 33 of the same report, stating that South Africa had been hit by a wave of unprecedented xenophobic violence targeting Zimbabweans and other foreign nationals. The other countries whose nationals were referred to should have been cited.

28. **Mr. Saeed** (Sudan) asked the Secretariat who was going to introduce the report of the Secretary-General on assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa (A/63/321) and who would answer Sudan's questions concerning the report, which had been submitted by the Secretary-General and was not the responsibility of the High Commissioner.

29. **Mr. Guterres** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that the report on refugees submitted by the Secretary-General presented information furnished by UNHCR, the body responsible for refugees. No international organization had a mandate in respect of displaced persons, who were, to begin with, the responsibility of States and were receiving aid, in application of the cluster approach, from different international agencies.

30. Replying to the Ethiopian delegation, he said that he was not in a position to identify international organizations referred to in paragraph 11 of the Secretary-General's report. Since his Office had not been authorized by the Ethiopian Government to carry out activities in Ogaden, his information on that region was sketchy.

31. Turning to the question of Zimbabwe and again recalling that document A/63/321 had not been submitted by UNHCR, he said that if acts of xenophobic violence in South Africa had caused many victims among Zimbabweans, it was probably because there was a large Zimbabwean community in that country. There was absolutely no link between the events that had occurred in South Africa and the situation in Zimbabwe.

32. **Mr. Alemu** (Ethiopia) sought further clarification concerning the "other organizations" referred to by the

High Commissioner, noting that his Government had worked in close collaboration with the United Nations, especially in the Somali area of the Ogaden region and, contrary to what the High Commissioner had said, had allowed United Nations agencies to work in all parts of the Somali regional state.

33. **Mr. Saadi** (Algeria), referring to the restructuring of the Office, in particular the regional offices referred to by the High Commissioner, asked what the Office's plans were for North Africa. Unfortunately, the High Commissioner had not mentioned the close cooperation between UNHCR and Algeria in providing protection and humanitarian assistance to refugees.

34. **The Chairman** advised the representative of the Sudan that the report of the Secretary-General on assistance to refugees, returnees and displaced persons in Africa (A/63/321) would not be introduced separately.

35. **Mr. Saeed** (Sudan) said that the High Commissioner did not seem to want to take any responsibility for the Secretary-General's report. He reiterated that the figures concerning his country were exaggerated and repeated his request to know the sources of those figures and whether, in general, the countries concerned had been consulted.

36. **Mr. Guterres** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that the report had indeed been prepared by the Secretary-General and not by his Office, but that he took responsibility for it. He again noted that the figures on refugees had been taken from UNHCR statistics and that those concerning internally displaced persons had been provided by various international organizations, including not only all the United Nations agencies involved in the cluster approach but also other organizations that had considerable experience in dealing with displaced persons. He was not in a position, however, to specify the names of those organizations.

37. With regard to the Ogaden, he explained that he had referred in particular to UNHCR, which had been refused permission to open a field office in an area close to the Somali border. UNHCR was still very interested in opening an office there, in order to monitor the protection of Somali refugees in Ethiopia in pursuance of its mandate.

38. Algeria and UNHCR had worked together for a very long time, and the Office cherished that collaboration. Moreover, in the context of decentralization, his Office was currently negotiating with the Tunisian Government to establish a "platform of support" in Tunis for its activities in the Maghreb, which would complement the structures already in place in Dakar and Pretoria. The situation in East Africa, where most of the Office's main operations were being conducted, was more complex, and it would therefore be difficult to focus all coordination efforts on a single regional office.

39. **Mr. Saeed** (Sudan) said that it was very important for statistics concerning refugees to be as accurate as possible. Since the countries themselves bore the primary responsibility for returnees and displaced persons, figures relating to them should be obtained directly from the countries and not from other sources.

40. **Mr. Guterres** (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) said that returnees were the responsibility of UNHCR; statistics concerning them were generally gathered in cooperation with the Governments concerned, and if there had been an error, he would take full responsibility for it and would be quite prepared to correct it. On the question of sources, he cited the summary of the Secretary-General's report, which stated that the report "draws on information received from a number of United Nations organizations", including UNHCR and probably a number of other organizations involved in the cluster approach; the list of those organizations was well-known and widely available.

41. **Mr. Alemu** (Ethiopia) said that, in future, the sources of information used should be clearly specified, so as to ensure their reliability. He reaffirmed his Government's continued willingness to cooperate closely with the United Nations system.

42. **Ms. Blic** (France), speaking on behalf of the European Union; the candidate countries Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia[1] and Turkey; the stabilization and association process countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia; and, in addition, Iceland, Ukraine and Moldova, said that the European Union was deeply concerned at the steady increase in the number of refugees and displaced persons, the mounting

[1] Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the stabilization and association process.

insecurity they faced and the threats to humanitarian staff, which made the situation worse. In future, as a result of climate change, the increase in the number of conflicts over natural resources and the increasing incidence of emergency situations, there would be further displacement. Given the steady increase in the number of migrants, States must find a way to safeguard the rights of refugees and asylum-seekers and protect them while also taking the necessary measures to control migration. In that regard, the European Union agreed with the Office that measures must be taken to address protection needs of refugees. The European Union also agreed with UNHCR that lasting solutions must be found to the plight of internally displaced persons, and that greater international coordination of humanitarian and development-related measures to assist displaced persons would help to improve the multifaceted response to their needs. Expressing concern at the de facto restriction of humanitarian access to populations in need of assistance, the European Union called on States that were parties to a conflict to abide by international humanitarian law and thanked the High Commissioner for his efforts to create humanitarian space in Georgia.

43. The European Union welcomed the progress made towards finding lasting solutions to the refugee situation, including through voluntary return or local integration. It welcomed the upcoming international conference on Afghan refugees, which UNHCR would be involved in organizing, and called for their voluntary return, when the security situation improved. The European Union hoped that global strategies conducive to sustainable return would be put in place.

44. With regard to protracted refugee situations, the European Union believed that the international community must take action to alleviate the burden on host countries, and it was aware that such action would include resettlement programmes on its own territory. Significant progress had been achieved in that regard: a European Refugee Fund had been established, 11 new European countries had signalled their willingness to establish a resettlement programme in cooperation with UNHCR and a common resettlement programme was being considered.

45. As the continent that received the most asylum requests, Europe must develop an effective asylum system. That was one of the objectives of the European pact on immigration and asylum recently adopted by heads of State and Government; the pact would reduce existing disparities between Member States, enhance solidarity within the European Union and strengthen its cooperation with UNHCR.

46. The European Union also welcomed the decline in the number of stateless persons and hailed the efforts of Nepal and Bangladesh to assist formerly stateless populations living on their territory.

47. Lastly, the European Union reiterated its commitment to United Nations humanitarian reform and greater coordination between UNHCR, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and other United Nations entities, and welcomed the effective cooperation in the field between UNHCR, the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and non-governmental organizations.

48. **Mr. Gaspar Martins** (Angola), speaking on behalf of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), noted that the benefits of globalization were yet to reach the poorest and, in particular, refugees and displaced persons, and expressed concern at the steady rise in the number of refugees in recent years. SADC wished to highlight the crucial role that UNHCR was playing by providing assistance to 26 million internally displaced persons, especially in the current context, which was marked by soaring energy and food prices, the global financial crisis and adverse weather conditions that had resulted in an increase in the displacement of persons. In that connection, SADC welcomed the Executive Committee's recent decisions, which would contribute to improving the assistance provided to those in need.

49. Conflict-induced displacement and the challenge of international protection, especially after the emergence of several post-electoral crises, renewed conflicts and mixed migration flows to urban areas, which had been causing population displacement across the continent, were all matters of grave concern to SADC.

50. Overall political stability in the region had led to some important humanitarian, social and political achievements, in particular, the completion of the repatriation process in Angola; the launching of repatriation operations for Congolese refugees in Zambia and other operations under way that had led to the return of up to 159,000 Congolese refugees; and the cessation of xenophobic violence in South Africa.

51. Furthermore, the emerging challenges of human trafficking, economic migration and brain drain must be tackled at the multilateral level, with the cooperation of regional groups and civil society.

52. SADC was also very concerned about sexual and gender-based violence against women and girls in the North Kivu province of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It condemned those heinous acts and welcomed the UNHCR Handbook on the Protection of Women and Girls, which reinforced the need to give attention to their needs.

53. SADC welcomed the preparations being made to draw up an African Union convention on internally displaced persons and firmly believed that that first legally binding instrument would contribute to the protection of refugees and internally displaced persons.

54. SADC also applauded the High Commissioner's commitment to efficiency savings at Headquarters and welcomed the release of 22 million dollars to address crucial gaps in the areas of malaria, malnutrition, sexual and gender-based violence, and reproductive health.

55. SADC strongly believed that it was crucial to find sustainable solutions to the situation of refugees in order to end their dependence on international assistance and put an end to the need for international protection; in that regard, SADC encouraged African governments to engage in comprehensive negotiations in order to create more local integration opportunities for long-staying refugees.

56. Finally, SADC wished to stress the importance of the Global Needs Assessment, which would provide a clear overview of the real needs, shortfalls and action required to improve the situation of refugees and internally displaced persons.

57. **Mr. Ashiki** (Japan) said that, in light of climate change and the global food crisis, it was urgent to find a way to address the issues raised by complicated displacement situations. Clearly, efforts must be redoubled to find durable solutions to protracted refugee situations and address without delay any new challenges that might arise, such as the rapid growth in the number of refugees in urban areas. To that end, Japan would continue to support the activities of UNHCR. It believed that investment in human resources was required and, in particular, that the capability of aid workers responding to emergency humanitarian situations should be enhanced. He commended the Office for its efforts in that regard, including through the eCentre in Tokyo.

58. The Government of Japan had set up in 2007 an inter-agency study group on resettlement that had undertaken an intensive study and engaged in discussions.

59. On human security, Japan believed that return and reintegration assistance were of the utmost importance for achieving durable solutions to refugee issues. Other tools, such as vocational training and education for children, would also be useful to returnees as they resettled. To that end, Japan had provided assistance to the UNHCR programme for the construction of educational facilities in South Sudan for integrating returnees and empowering host communities.

60. His delegation welcomed the efforts undertaken by the Office of the High Commissioner, in the area of structural reform, including the establishment of the Global Service Centre in Budapest, the ongoing review of the functions of headquarters, the global field review and decentralization and regionalization. It hoped that the ongoing Global Needs Assessment and the introduction of a new budgetary structure would lead to effective results-based management. The reform activities of the Office must be in line with the reform of the United Nations as a whole and aim to strengthen humanitarian responses. With regard to the cluster approach, his delegation agreed with UNHCR that there was room for improvement.

61. Lastly, with regard to the security of humanitarian personnel, it was vital to implement the recommendations of the Independent Panel on Safety and Security of United Nations Personnel and Premises. Japan would like to consult with Member States and relevant organizations on ways of ensuring the safety and security of all those who worked to provide humanitarian aid.

62. **Mr. Saeed** (Sudan) said that the Sudan was a country which, since achieving independence, had received a large number of refugees from neighbouring countries, despite the possible economic, social and cultural consequences. The signing and implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement had created conditions that facilitated the voluntary return of Sudanese nationals from abroad. Greater efforts should be made to address their reintegration into society. He appealed to the international community to continue to

support the voluntary return programme. His country was making every effort to move the peace process in Darfur forward under the leadership of the Head of State, who had enlisted the support of civil society for that cause. Under the Afro-Arab initiative proposed by Qatar, negotiations would be held with armed groups in order to resolve the conflict. His delegation wished to continue cooperating with the United Nations system and other agencies in order to share the burden and move on from the relief phase to the implementation of development projects in regions of the country affected by the conflict. The Sudan was committed to ensuring the safety of humanitarian workers and respected the agreements signed in that connection with the United Nations. The statement made by the representative of France on behalf of the European Union contained inaccurate information. The European Union, including France, would do well to contribute to the efforts to find solutions to the crisis in Darfur by putting pressure on the rebels to participate in the peace process. They should also refrain from spreading misleading information.

63. **Mr. McMahan** (United States of America) said that the activities of UNHCR had never been more valuable than at the current time, as the numbers of displaced and stateless persons continued to rise. Refugee protection was an obligation and not a choice. The safety of refugees and humanitarian personnel was tenuous. In the last few years, the United States Government had worked with UNHCR to ensure that experienced officers were assigned to where they were most needed. As structural and management reforms were being considered and introduced, UNHCR should not sacrifice that fundamental obligation or the proper staffing of posts. The success of the reform efforts would be measured in terms of the protection provided to refugees and their impact on those who needed assistance.

64. He commended UNHCR for increasing its protective efforts on behalf of stateless persons and urged it to strengthen its work on the right to nationality in collaboration with other agencies such as the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), on birth registration and education, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on voter registration.

65. His delegation also welcomed the fact that, thanks to the Dialogue on Protection Challenges, UNHCR was pursuing durable solutions for refugees in protracted situations and had increased access to third-country resettlement. His country strongly supported the motivation behind the critical reform work that should enable UNHCR to better serve the needs of refugees. While the United States supported the Global Needs Assessment initiative, it considered that there should be further discussion of priorities, given the funding implications of the widescale application of that initiative. UNHCR had embarked on far-reaching change that was unprecedented for a United Nations agency. It should continue its consultations with Member States in order to help them to explain the reasons for the reform efforts to their national decision makers.

66. The United States Government was a steadfast partner of UNHCR and, as of 30 September, had contributed over $500 million to the agency's 2008 activities. It had also resettled over 60,000 refugees in the United States that year.

67. **Ms. Blum** (Colombia) said that the issue of climate change and its impact should be studied further in the light of existing international legal instruments and the mandates of the humanitarian assistance agencies. With regard to UNHCR collaboration frameworks and partnerships, it was important to reiterate that the approach based on the "Delivering as One" model was not applicable to all countries.

68. There were differences in the criteria used by UNHCR and by the Colombian Government to estimate the number of Colombians who were refugees or displaced in their own country. The estimates of displaced persons contained in document A/63/12 were cumulative data covering an 11-year period which did not take into account returnees or cases of successful social integration, or the significant reduction in new displacements since 2002 owing to the improvement in the country's security situation. The evaluation criteria should be standardized.

69. In order to comply with its obligations in that area, the Colombian Government had developed legislation and policies to ensure the protection of displaced persons and provide them with the necessary assistance, including food assistance, priority access to health services and education, subsidized housing and assistance in setting up income-generating projects. An annual budget of about $500 million was allocated to the programmes implemented by the 15 entities that made up the National System of Comprehensive Care

for Displaced Persons. Currently, 260,000 displaced families were cared for under a national programme that provided them with a needs-based education and food subsidy. In 2008, 83,000 families had benefited from income-generating projects and 280,000 children had been enrolled in the state education system. During the 2006-2008 period, 557,000 displaced persons had joined the subsidized health system. The Presidential Agency for Social Action coordinated the programme to better address their needs, taking into account the guidelines and decisions of the Constitutional Court. Under the leadership of the Government, a national coordination mechanism for humanitarian assistance whose membership included stakeholders, such as local authorities, international agencies and civil society organizations had been established. The aim was to strengthen ties and coordination among the parties concerned so as to ensure the coherence of humanitarian activities and avoid duplication.

70. She shared the view of UNHCR that measures should be taken to ensure the integration, return or resettlement of displaced persons. That was why it was important to strengthen cooperation between United Nations agencies and States in order to move from the relief phase to development activities.

71. *Ms. Seanadzu (Ghana), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.*

72. **Mr. Attiya** (Egypt) said that his country was concerned about the adverse effects of rising food and energy prices, climate change and the international financial crisis could have on the resources available to UNHCR. He noted the Office's efforts in the context of inter-agency coordination to provide protection and assistance for displaced persons. However, such activities should be undertaken within a framework of a completely transparent dialogue with Member States and should be consistent with relevant General Assembly resolutions.

73. He called on Member States to coordinate their efforts to address the root causes of natural disasters, drought and conflicts that had caused the exponential increase in the number of internally displaced persons. It was a matter of concern that 52 million people around the world had been displaced within their own countries, with Africa accounting for more than a quarter of them, according to the report of the Secretary-General (A/63/321). Greater attention should be given to that issue to enable developing countries to pursue their legitimate aspirations and achieve the Millennium Development Goals. He noted the seriousness of the problem in a number of countries, but emphasized that any solution should take the original mandate of UNHCR into account. New mechanisms should be devised in order to diversify UNHCR financing, in view of the close links between the political, economic and humanitarian aspects of the refugee problem.

74. In order to strengthen international action, a number of goals had to be achieved. To that end, the international community's efforts geared towards eliminating the root causes of conflicts — the driving force behind such movements of persons worldwide — should be consolidated. The agencies of the United Nations system should also play their role, in accordance with the Charter, to help Member States to enhance their capacities to sustain their own economic development. Refugee protection should also be considered within the context of promoting respect for international refugee law, international human rights law and international humanitarian law. The principles of international solidarity and effective partnership should also be applied in order to share the burden and responsibilities of protecting and providing assistance to refugees. Conditions that encouraged the voluntary return of refugees to their home countries, including providing them with the means of making a decent living, should be created.

75. Egypt had always contributed to the development of the principles of international refugee law by supporting efforts to invigorate a number of initiatives designed to respond to the changing international environment, including the Convention Plus initiative which complemented the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol.

76. *Mr. Majoor (Netherlands), Chairman, resumed the Chair.*

77. **Ms. Zhang** Dan (China) said that in recent years, UNHCR had shifted its focus from material assistance to strengthening the capacities of refugees in the search for durable solutions. The number of refugees had reached 11.7 million people worldwide and was still growing, at a rate that overwhelmed the Office's capacity to respond. New conflicts and frequent natural disasters brought their own tolls of refugees. In addition, illegal immigrants and criminal elements

continued to abuse international refugee protection mechanisms.

78. Her Government hoped that UNHCR would continue to fulfil its core mandate by stepping up performance and enhancing coverage ratio and the quality of its services. The agency should continue to advocate the principle of international solidarity and shared responsibility to facilitate durable solutions to the refugee question.

79. China was party to the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol and had implemented its obligations thereto. It wished to thank UNHCR for its assistance in the aftermath of the recent violent earthquake and during the Beijing Olympics and Paralympics. China would continue its cooperation with UNHCR in the area of capacity-building, including with regard to refugee legislation, and would work with the agency to ensure refugee protection.

80. **Mr. Shukla** (India) said that despite UNHCR efforts, the number of refugees continued to grow, as revealed in the statistics published in the High Commissioner's report (A/63/12). Recalling the changing role of UNHCR since its establishment in 1950, he stressed the agency's expanded involvement with internally displaced persons, maintaining that the role of the High Commissioner in that domain should be clarified. In situations involving internal displacement, UNHCR should act at the explicit request of the State concerned and take into account the complementarities of mandates and the expertise of other organizations.

81. He stressed that the source and destination of a majority of refugee movements lay in developing countries and that the number of refugees burdened the already strained economies and limited resources of those countries. In pursuit of the MDGs, it was vital to recognize those countries' difficulties and strengthen efforts at the international level in the area of prevention, emergency relief and rehabilitation of refugees. The principles of international solidarity and burden sharing were the foundations on which the agency's mission should be based.

82. Although India was not a signatory to the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, which did not address the problem of massive refugee flows or factors such as mixed migration, its record in dealing with refugees was exemplary. India continued to host a large number of refugees managed within its own financial resources and based on the principles enshrined in its Constitution and other legislation, including the principles of protection and *non-refoulement*. It would continue to work closely with the international community to address the major challenge posed by the refugee question.

83. His delegation welcomed the reform process embarked upon by UNHCR and stressed the need to preserve the impartiality and non-political character of the agency, which must continue to work in close cooperation with concerned States.

84. **Mr. Bródi** (Hungary) said that his delegation was gravely concerned by the increasing number of refugees and commended the measures undertaken by UNHCR to mitigate the dire consequences of natural disasters and armed conflicts. He paid special tribute to the agency's efforts to tackle the problem of displaced persons and mixed migration.

85. At the regional level, Hungary attached special importance to the UNHCR 10-point Plan of Action relating to the European Union's eastern and south-eastern borders. The Plan of Action would in the long run also have a positive effect on other States, especially countries of origin. Hungary was committed to the development of a common European immigration policy and welcomed the adoption in October 2008 by the Council of Europe of a European pact on immigration and asylum.

86. The alarming growth in refugee flows called for a strengthening of UNHCR capacities. Hungary strongly supported ongoing reform of the agency, which was already bringing results. In that connection, Hungary fully supported the outposting programme established by the High Commissioner, which was aimed at rationalizing his Office and cutting administrative costs in order to better support refugees. His Government was committed to providing further support, including funding, for UNHCR activities at the global and regional levels. Moreover, since 2005, the UNHCR office in Budapest had enabled very fruitful cooperation between his Government and UNHCR, including for the elaboration of national refugee law and resettlement programmes. Hungary welcomed the choice of Budapest to host the new UNHCR Global Service Centre and hoped that the plans for enlarging the Centre by outposting new units would soon be implemented. Such outposting had already resulted in

significant savings and had increased the funds available to assist the millions in need.

87. **Mr. Gram-Johannssen** (Norway) welcomed the work of the High Commissioner, particularly with regard to the promotion and protection of humanitarian principles. The agency's main asset was its staff, which had earned his admiration and respect.

88. Although the agency continued to serve refugees first and foremost, Norway welcomed the fact that UNHCR had extended its activities to include displaced persons. It also encouraged the High Commissioner to further his cooperation with the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs and relevant humanitarian organizations, stressing the need for it to refine and adapt its working methods in that area.

89. Participants at the conference on guiding principles on internally displaced persons, held in Oslo in October 2008, had underlined the need to continue taking account of those principles in national, regional and international policies, and to enhance their implementation.

90. The participation of UNHCR in the United Nations reform process at all levels, and particularly in the field, was vital. UNHCR should draw upon system-wide expertise and capacity when dealing with cross-cutting issues such as gender.

91. Norway strongly supported the efforts of UNHCR in relation to Afghanistan, and was fully committed to strengthening the United Nations presence there, including in the humanitarian field, while at the same time hoping for a political solution.

92. In connection with the budget and financial resources, he was concerned at the gap between budgeted needs and the actual needs of the beneficiaries. In that respect, he was in favour of the General Needs Assessment. In spite of the financial crisis, donor countries must continue to make concerted and sustained efforts to meet the needs of the increasing numbers of refugees and displaced people.

93. Norway had recently presented a new humanitarian strategy, reaffirming its commitment to humanitarian partnership and the promotion of a global humanitarian system for all. Only a robust international humanitarian system could meet today's challenges.

94. He encouraged delegations wishing to join in sponsoring the resolution on UNHCR and had not yet done so to contact him.

95. **Ms. Mintz** (Canada) welcomed the fact that the High Commissioner had decided to dedicate his next Dialogue on Protection Challenges, to be held in December 2008, to protracted refugee situations. That approach must be continued, so as to secure comprehensive solutions for long-standing refugee populations. She especially appreciated the leadership of UNHCR in identifying five protracted refugee situations that would benefit from international attention. She encouraged UNHCR to cooperate with Member States in advance of the Dialogue, to enable them to prepare for it.

96. With 2009 proclaimed as the International Year of Reconciliation, promoting sustainable peace and reconciliation was of paramount importance for the safe and voluntary return of displaced people around the world.

97. Canada continued to support the process of structural and management reform within UNHCR. She welcomed the integration of the Global Needs Assessment initiative into a results-based management framework, needs-based planning being an essential tool for ensuring that needs were assessed globally and prioritized accordingly. She would encourage UNHCR to develop clear benchmarks in order to be able to measure the success of the reform process.

98. Canada recognized the Office's leadership of the protection cluster for populations affected by conflict, including internally displaced persons, and supported its efforts to ensure that it had the capacity to discharge its responsibilities in that area, while continuing to fulfil its mandate for refugee protection. She commended UNHCR on its ongoing commitment to respond to the needs of refugees for physical and legal protection, while emphasizing the need to mainstream age, gender and diversity into its analysis of protection needs. She welcomed the adoption by the Executive Committee of conclusions on international protection, and looked forward to their being endorsed by the General Assembly.

99. In the sixtieth anniversary year of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Canada welcomed the Office's support for human rights. Her country was strongly committed to working with Member States, UNHCR and its partners to respond to the needs of the world's displaced people.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.

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Chairman: Mr. Peralta (Vice-Chairman) ..... (Paraguay)

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In the absence of Mr. Majoor, Netherlands, Mr. Peralta (Paraguay), Vice-Chairman, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 39: Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, questions relating to refugees, returnees and displaced persons and humanitarian questions (*continued*) (A/63/12 and Add.1, and A/63/321)

1. **Mr. Jung** Jin-ho (Republic of Korea) said that his delegation had highly valued the discussions and conclusions of the fifty-ninth session of the Executive Committee of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), which had taken place in October 2008. His country welcomed the adoption of the General Conclusion on International Protection, which emphasized durable solutions such as voluntary repatriation, local integration and resettlement. The recent rise in mixed migration called for innovative approaches. The enhanced cooperation between Member States and international agencies, such as UNHCR and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), was an encouraging sign.

2. His country strongly supported UNHCR reform, including the streamlining of its Headquarters and the outposting of certain functions to Budapest, which would reduce administrative costs. Decentralization and regionalization would bring decision-making closer to the field. Result-based management was also progressing well: Focus software had been introduced, and the Global Needs Assessments Initiative had been launched. However, reform was not an end in itself; he hoped that UNHCR would keep Member States informed of developments on the ground.

3. His delegation was concerned at repeated reports that countries were forcibly returning refugees on security grounds. Protection of refugees was a non-political act, and the principle of non-refoulement should be upheld by all States. The widespread recharacterization of asylum seekers and refugees and the proliferation of labels referring to them were also worrying and ran the risk of narrowing the concept of refugees. At the domestic level, the Republic of Korea was amending the Immigration Control Act in order to improve its asylum system and treatment of refugees and asylum seekers.

4. **Mr. Al-Shami** (Yemen) said that his country had been among the first to ratify the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and its 1967 Protocol. Yemen had implemented the provisions of those instruments in accordance with its Islamic and Arab principles. Since the early 1990s, it had received tens of thousands of refugees from the Horn of Africa, in particular from Somalia. The figures provided by UNHCR showed that human trafficking across the Gulf of Aden had tripled between August 2007 and August 2008. Despite the modest means at its disposal, Yemen granted such migrants their full rights to movement, work and health care. In so doing, it was cooperating with the relevant international agencies. Yemen was also addressing the root causes by seeking to promote reconciliation in the conflict in Somalia. It had hosted a number of relevant meetings, most recently the Regional Conference of 19 and 20 May 2008.

5. As a result of such migration, Yemen faced a significant cost in economic, social, health and security terms. It welcomed the efforts of UNHCR and looked forward to cooperating with it in future. Efforts to reform it and increase the means at its disposal were therefore welcome. It was important to seek a solution to the conflict in Somalia. Lastly, in view of the scale of the issue, Yemen urged donors to increase their support for host States.

6. **Mr. Borg** (Malta) said that his country was significantly affected by illegal migration and human trafficking in the Mediterranean. The precarious vessels used by such migrants led to frequent loss of life. Human trafficking in the region was detrimental to genuine refugees and persons qualifying for humanitarian status under international law. The number of migrants received by Malta had increased by almost 50 per cent over the previous year. During that time, Malta had received the highest per capita number of asylum applicants in Europe and also had the highest acceptance rate. Malta was a member State of the European Union, a party to the United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and a member of the International Organization for Migration. It was fully committed to fulfilling its obligations towards refugees.

7. However, Malta was a small island State with a high population density and limited absorption capacity, and its burden was acutely disproportionate to its size. The country was further constrained by a lack of human and financial resources, which limited not only its security capability, but also the social and administrative facilities available. In accordance with

the principles of solidarity and shared responsibility, Malta had repeatedly requested assistance from the European Union, other States and UNHCR. It welcomed the recent adoption of the European Pact on Immigration and Asylum, which would help develop a holistic approach to the issue. The Pact provided for beneficiaries of international protection to be relocated within the European Union. Towards that end, Malta looked forward to working closely with countries of origin and transit.

8. **Mr. Chabar** (Morocco) said that political conflict, climate change and food insecurity made it increasingly difficult to deliver humanitarian aid. Nevertheless, it was morally unacceptable for the mission of UNHCR to be hampered by any political, ideological or other considerations. Capacity-building had been significantly improved; but UNHCR's direct presence on the ground remained crucial, and could not be sidelined. However, the Office's activities, which were by nature humanitarian and social, were perceived by certain States as having political implications. Morocco therefore continued to call for civilian populations to be separated from armed elements, something that was essential if UNHCR was to preserve its fundamental guiding principles.

9. Unfortunately, UNHCR was often prevented from estimating the size of refugee populations, something that was essential for its work. Host countries had a specific responsibility to allow them to do so. Any shortcoming in that connection should be condemned by humanitarian agencies. Whether in the eastern part of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, in Iraq or elsewhere, the voluntary repatriation of refugees should not be hindered. With the support of the international community, UNHCR should therefore take action to assess the needs of the populations under its remit. Morocco would stand by it in order to ensure that its work could take place without hindrance.

10. **Mr. Kapambwe** (Zambia) said that his delegation was concerned that the numbers of refugees and internally displaced persons worldwide were increasing for the second consecutive year. Progress in achieving sustainable solutions in Africa and the continued decrease in the number of refugees there since 2001 were welcome. However, in 2007, Africa's 12.7 million internally displaced persons had represented half of the world's total. It was hoped that African initiatives, including a draft convention on the protection of internally displaced persons and preparations for the African Union Special Summit of Heads of State and Government on Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons in Africa, to be held in Uganda in early 2009, would place internally displaced persons on the same footing as refugees in terms of protection provided. The convention would be the first regional treaty on internally displaced persons.

11. Zambia had been hosting refugees for over four decades, and currently some 87,000 refugees were there, mainly from the Democratic Republic of the Congo, with smaller numbers from Angola, Burundi, Rwanda and Somalia. Because of the relative stability of the region, Zambia had concentrated on voluntary repatriation. It was expected that repatriation of refugees from the Democratic Republic of the Congo would be completed in 2009 or 2010.

12. While repatriation efforts for Angola had been officially completed in 2007, 27,000 of the 175,000 refugees who had been repatriated had returned to Zambia since then, raising concerns about the effectiveness and sustainability of reintegration efforts in the country of origin. Another solution was local integration. Zambia had been engaged in an initiative to develop infrastructure and agriculture in various parts of the country to help refugees achieve self-sufficiency.

13. Increasing global challenges were stretching the capacities of humanitarian organizations to respond. The inability of the World Food Programme to continue its feeding programme for vulnerable refugees, including the disabled, the aged and the chronically ill, mainly from Angola, was of great concern and could lead to a looming food crisis if the necessary funds could not be mobilized. The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) must not allow the situation to deteriorate. The need for innovative resource mobilization methods was critical, and the Global Needs Assessment Initiative, focusing on eight pilot countries including Zambia and based on refugees' actual needs rather than on available resources, was welcome. The international community must step up its assistance for humanitarian relief as well as for long-term development needs.

14. **Mr. Kruljević** (Serbia) said that UNHCR had recently included Serbia on a list of five countries with a protracted refugee situation. There were 98,000 registered refugees in Serbia, but the actual number was closer to 300,000. If internally displaced persons

were included, the number stood at half a million, or more than 5 per cent of the country's total population. Many refugee centres had been closed, but some 8,000 people still lived in them, some of whom had been there for more than 15 years. More than 40,000 internally displaced members of the Roma community were living in temporary settlements in extremely difficult conditions.

15. Serbia had done much to provide assistance to refugees and internally displaced persons. The two main solutions were repatriation and local integration. The former was, of course, the optimum solution. Pursuant to the Sarajevo Declaration, returnees should be able to realize the rights to occupancy/tenancy, property, labour or a pension in their country of origin. Most, but not all, signatory States, had met their obligations in that regard.

16. In regard to the return of internally displaced persons from Kosovo and Metohija, discouragingly little progress had been made since the arrival of the United Nations presence. The international presence had the obligation to implement Security Council resolution 1244 (1999) fully, particularly with respect to their safe and sustainable return home, but it had yet to do so. Further international assistance was also indispensable for the local integration of refugees within Serbia. Notwithstanding its economic difficulties, his country had provided assistance to those very vulnerable groups of its population and would continue to work with UNHCR in that regard.

17. **Mr. Emadi** (Islamic Republic of Iran) said that his country had hosted nearly 3 million Afghan refugees over the course of three decades, granting them residence permits and welfare, health, educational and other services equal to those provided to Iranian nationals. Meeting the needs of the refugee population had made his country's already complex socio-economic situation even more difficult. Iraqi refugees had also been received in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

18. From 2002 until 2006, voluntary repatriation of Afghan refugees had been carried out in cooperation with the Government of Afghanistan and the UNHCR. Support for the Afghan refugees had also included the provision of thousands of scholarships to Afghan university students, support for reconstruction and infrastructure projects and enhanced investments in Afghanistan and Iraq. Assistance from the international community was needed. It did not make sense for one country to receive nearly 10 per cent of the world's refugees while other countries felt no responsibility to shoulder the burden.

19. **Ms. Mah** (Thailand) said that her country had the largest UNHCR resettlement programme in Asia. There were 130,000 displaced persons there as well as 3 million illegal migrants. While resettlement was a durable solution, efforts should also focus on prevention measures and finding solutions to the root causes which gave rise to refugee and displaced populations. There should be support to efforts to promote political, economic and social conditions conducive to return, such as development and income-generating projects.

20. Thailand had worked hard to create a positive environment for displaced persons in temporary shelter areas by supplementing education activities, vocational training, sports, recreation and language programmes and holding discussions with private sector partners on income-generating opportunities. The largest share of the burden of displacement continued to be shouldered by developing countries and even least developed countries. The international community must step up its efforts to assist developing countries to overcome such challenges, particularly in the current difficult economic climate.

21. **Mr. Tarar** (Pakistan) said that the alarming rise in the number of displaced persons and refugees required a coordinated response from the international community. That response must be based on the principles of transparency and impartiality and take into account the effects on host countries of the protracted presence of refugees. UNHCR should provide host countries with more assistance in coping with refugee populations, and more attention should likewise be paid to rehabilitation of damaged ecosystems and infrastructure. The food crisis had made it more difficult for host countries to meet the needs of their refugee populations; new international initiatives were needed to combat malnutrition and disease among refugees, particularly women and children.

22. Pakistan continued to host the largest refugee population in the world. In February 2007, in cooperation with UNHCR, his Government had undertaken the first ever campaign to register those refugees; more than two million Afghan refugees had been registered. While he supported the principle of the

voluntary return of refugees, he underscored the importance of creating the necessary conditions to encourage refugees to return. Viable individual and family return packages could, for example, be offered. The sustainable reintegration of Afghan refugees into their own society would likewise contribute immensely to regional stability.

23. Until such time as all Afghan refugees returned to their country, the international community must continue its support for them. That support had, however, declined considerably since 2002 and must be increased. The international community had a responsibility to provide the necessary protection to refugees without creating new political, economic and social tensions and issues. His delegation remained committed to meeting the needs of refugees and to ensuring their repatriation with dignity and honour to their home countries.

24. **Mr. Iddi** (United Republic of Tanzania) said that the growing number of refugees and displaced persons caused by conflict situations as well as by deprivation, environmental degradation and climate change posed ever greater challenges. More must be done to meet those challenges, including by strengthening conflict resolution and peacebuilding efforts and ensuring that UNHCR had safe and unhindered access to refugees and displaced persons.

25. At the national level, his Government had developed, assisted by UNHCR and the donor community, a comprehensive sustainable strategy to address the refugee problem based on voluntary repatriation as well as naturalization and local integration. While the international community had been very supportive of that approach, there remained a nearly $11 million shortfall in the $34 million pledged under the supplementary appeal made by UNHCR in that regard. He hoped donors would fund that shortfall as well as the complex process of elimination of refugee settlements and integration of their residents into the local community.

26. His Government supported the efforts of the international community and UNHCR in meeting the needs of the Burundian refugees since 1972 and welcomed the signing of the Arusha Peace and Reconciliation Agreement, which had created an enabling environment for the voluntary return of those refugees. Accordingly, his country would close one of the two remaining camps housing those refugees in its north-western region but was also undertaking the huge task of naturalizing more than 200,000 Burundian refugees, or 80 per cent of the total. The remaining 20 per cent had opted to return to Burundi; and half had already done so. More State land, however, must be made available to returning refugees in Burundi in order to promote reintegration and make the repatriation process sustainable.

27. **Mr. Frommelt** (Liechtenstein) said that the global financial, energy and food crises, which would particularly affect the developing countries, coupled with the effects of climate change and environmental degradation, would have serious consequences for refugees and displaced persons, who already generally lived in appalling situations. Higher priority should be given to meeting the needs of refugees and displaced persons, in particular with a view to finding long-term solutions. While voluntary repatriation remained the ideal solution, in situations where that was not possible other options including, for example, regional approaches must be explored. His Government was working with UNHCR to find durable solutions for the resettlement of asylum-seekers. It had long supported the activities of UNHCR both financially and through secondment of personnel and would continue to do so.

28. He commended UNHCR for its commitment to the implementation of the Agenda for Protection and the holding of an annual Dialogue on Protection Challenges in Geneva and looked forward to the adoption by the Office's Executive Committee of a General Conclusion on international protection. In that regard he stressed the importance of the principle of non-refoulement. The applicability of that principle under international law had been discussed at the joint Organization for Cooperation and Security in Europe (OSCE) and Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Expert Workshop on Human Rights and International Cooperation in Counter-Terrorism held in Liechtenstein in November 2006. Participants had underscored that the principle of non-refoulement was recognized implicitly or explicitly in a number of international human rights instruments, was an accepted tenet of customary international law, in particular with regard to Sates that were not parties to the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees, and was considered to be absolute.

29. Liechtenstein supported the efforts of UNHCR to streamline its Geneva office while strengthening field

operations and to decentralize and regionalize its operations, especially in the light of its modest resources. Its reliance on mostly voluntary contributions made planning difficult. Broadened partnerships and strengthened bilateral and multilateral cooperation would therefore be essential. UNHCR was already a well-managed agency, and he welcomed measures adopted to ensure its continued efficiency and effectiveness in the future.

30. **Mr. Muita** (Kenya) expressed alarm at the increase in the number of refugees and displaced persons in Africa and said that African Governments and regional and subregional organizations must take decisive action to address the root causes of conflicts that led to the uprooting of populations. Peacebuilding and conflict resolution must likewise be incorporated into humanitarian strategies, and donors should increase their post-conflict and development aid in Africa. In that context he welcomed the initiatives by African States in the Horn of Africa and Great Lakes regions and Kenya, which should be supported by the international community. He pledged his Government's support for the search for peace in Somalia, implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Southern Sudan and willingness to participate in peacekeeping activities.

31. As a signatory of the 1951 Geneva Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1969 African Union Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee Problems in Africa, his Government granted access to asylum-seekers and provided assistance to refugees. It supported the efforts of the African Union to conclude a convention for the protection and assistance of internally displaced persons. Pursuant to the Refugees Act 2006, which had created the Commission for Refugee Affairs, his Government had taken a more active role in refugee management, in particular with regard to registration and determination of their status, and collaborated closely with UNHCR in that regard.

32. More than 250,000 refugees from neighbouring countries were currently in Kenya. The situation in Somalia in particular posed a grave danger to peace and security in his country due to arms smuggling and the threat of terrorism. The violence that had followed the Kenyan elections in December 2007, in which more than 1,000 people had been killed, had caused the displacement of over 300,000 people. The recent power-sharing agreement had facilitated the voluntary return of most of those persons. He thanked the Organization for its support during the post-election period and acknowledged the moral and material support provided by numerous Member States.

33. Voluntary repatriation, local integration and third country resettlement remained the most desirable and durable solutions for refugees. He therefore welcomed the consolidation of peace and security in 2007 in such countries as Angola, Burundi, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Liberia, which had facilitated the return of more than 300,000 refugees, as well as the naturalization of more than 200,000 Burundian refugees by the United Republic of Tanzania. His Government was heavily engaged in peace efforts, in the Great Lakes and Horn of Africa regions in particular, that had allowed for the return of tens of thousands of displaced persons. It would continue to support the international community's efforts to provide humanitarian assistance whenever necessary and would not renege on its responsibility to protect refugees.

34. **Ms. Abdelhak** (Algeria) said that Algeria had hosted refugees from Western Sahara for three decades. Her Government welcomed the efforts of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) and his staff in protecting the refugees living in camps in Tindouf while they awaited a just and durable solution to the conflict in Western Sahara. Thanks to the efforts of UNHCR, the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Government of Algeria had signed a letter of understanding that had made it possible to mitigate the precarious living conditions of the Saharawi refugees.

35. Her delegation hoped that the 18-month agreement between WFP and the Algerian Government could be extended so as to ensure that food aid could continue to be provided to the refugee population, which included children under five, pregnant and nursing women and schoolchildren. Saharawi women had played a key role in organizing the distribution of food aid in the camps. Her delegation also welcomed the efforts by UNHCR to help refugees in Tindouf renew their ties with their families living in Western Sahara.

36. **Mr. Islam** (Bangladesh) said that his Government was doing its utmost, within its modest resources, to host the refugees living in Bangladesh. The support of UNHCR had proved immensely useful in that regard.

The Office's activities and programmes in Bangladesh had significantly ameliorated the situation of refugees, particularly with regard to the mandate to identify, prevent and reduce statelessness and to pursue the Delivering as One principle.

37. It was hoped that the second Dialogue on Protection Challenges would contribute to resolving the protracted refugee situation in Bangladesh. His country and UNHCR had agreed to reactivate the tripartite mechanism with Myanmar to complete the voluntary repatriation of the remaining 27,000 Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh to Myanmar. The issuance of new identity cards by UNHCR to refugees, which were recognized as valid identity documents by his Government, was bringing some noticeable protection benefits, particularly to refugee women.

38. It was heartening to note that UNHCR was striving to focus its operations and devote more resources to the field. The refugee population worldwide would benefit from the ongoing decentralization and regionalization of the Office's work, as well as its undertaking of human resources, structural and management reforms. UNHCR should play a larger role in complementing the ongoing peacekeeping and peacebuilding operations of the United Nations. His Government shared the concern expressed by the High Commissioner with regard to the budgetary constraints faced by UNHCR. The Office should be adequately prepared to address the growing scale and complexity of forced displacement, with special emphasis on the adverse effects of climate change.

39. **Ms. Nadjaf** (Afghanistan) said that three decades of devastating conflict in her country had forced millions of Afghans to go into exile. Her Government was grateful to the countries that had hosted Afghan refugees, especially its neighbours Pakistan and the Islamic Republic of Iran. Afghanistan's main objective in 2008 and 2009 was to improve conditions for voluntary repatriation as well as the reintegration of returnees, in conformity with the objectives of her Government's National Development Strategy and the tripartite agreements on voluntary repatriation signed with UNHCR and the Governments of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan. Accordingly, her delegation called for sustained international assistance for the creation of a suitable environment for the return and reintegration of Afghan refugees.

40. Afghanistan welcomed the temporary suspension of the UNHCR voluntary repatriation operation from Pakistan to Afghanistan during the annual winter break, in view of the difficulties that it could create for the reintegration of Afghan refugees. Her Government was concerned about the insecurity in the Federally Administered Tribal Areas of Pakistan and the influx of refugees from those areas into Afghanistan, which could worsen the humanitarian crisis in her country. Many returnees were facing reintegration difficulties, including lack of land, shelter, water and basic services such as health care and education.

41. The Ministry of Refugees and Repatriation of Afghanistan was monitoring the situation to ensure that returns were voluntary, dignified and gradual. It was focusing on the provision of key physical, legal and material necessities linked to the reintegration process. In partnership with UNHCR, the Ministry was providing reintegration programmes, particularly in the sectors of shelter, water and income generation.

42. Insecurity was the main obstacle to the return of Afghan refugees and their effective and sustainable reintegration. The deterioration of the security situation in the south of Afghanistan caused by the terrorist activities of the Taliban and Al-Qaida had created difficult conditions for returnees and restricted the scope of humanitarian assistance. The global rise in food prices, the current drought and the approaching winter had resulted in high dependence on humanitarian assistance. Despite the joint appeal issued by Afghanistan and the United Nations for additional financial mobilization in response to the impending crisis, only 32 per cent of the identified need had been met.

43. It was estimated that some 540,000 Afghan refugees would return home in the next two years. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Afghanistan and UNHCR would co-host an international conference on return and reintegration on 19 November in Kabul. The conference would address how best to ensure the sustainable return of refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) and seek to reconcile the repatriation targets and timelines proposed by neighbouring countries with the increasingly challenging operational environment in Afghanistan. It would also be a forum to mobilize additional resources for a comprehensive, integrated approach and for multi-year funding delivered through the framework of the National

Development Strategy. She invited Member States to participate in the conference.

44. She would like to express the gratitude of her Government to the international community and United Nations agencies for their support in addressing the plight of Afghan refugees and internally displaced persons. No sign of confidence in the country's future would be more compelling than the return of its citizens to participate in the upcoming presidential election. Afghan refugees would not hesitate to return home if Afghanistan managed to ensure peace, security, prosperity and justice. Her Government remained committed to working with the international community to fulfil its commitments made during the recent donor conference in Paris to ensure conditions for the voluntary and sustainable return of Afghans to their homeland.

45. **Mr. Vigny** (Switzerland) said that the primary responsibility for the protection of refugees lay with States. Switzerland continued to call for the ratification by the largest possible number of States of the 1951 Convention relating to the Status of Refugees and the 1967 Protocol thereto. His Government welcomed the efforts of UNHCR to devise ways and means to strengthen the reception and protection capacity of countries confronted with large refugee flows. Switzerland had developed a regional protection concept, the main purpose of which was to contribute to more rapid and effective protection of refugees in their region of origin.

46. His delegation commended UNHCR for the work accomplished during 2008 in connection with negotiations for the adoption of a General Conclusion on international protection. Switzerland attached great importance to the Executive Committee's conclusions, the primary function of which was to fill certain gaps in the area of protection, and wished to see future consultations in that regard.

47. Internally displaced persons had specific and increasing needs for protection. The chairmanship of the protection cluster gave UNHCR a leading role in the implementation of the collaborative cluster approach. Concerning protection and assistance on behalf of civilian populations in the event of non-international armed conflict, his delegation recalled the specific mandate granted to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and in that regard called upon UNHCR and ICRC to pursue a clear and constructive dialogue in Geneva as well as in the countries of operation.

48. He commended the efforts of UNHCR to face the challenges on the ground in the implementation of the cluster approach. Given the increasing work of UNHCR in protecting internally displaced persons, special emphasis should be placed on training measures to improve the Office's operational and management capacities.

49. Since 2007, the number of refugees throughout the world had increased, particularly in urban areas. New and appropriate responses were needed in terms of identification, registration and delivery modalities and protection. Switzerland wished to assure UNHCR of its support in facing those challenges and awaited with interest a general policy statement concerning urban refugees. One of the new challenges that would inevitably affect the international community was the potential impact of climate change on population movements. Switzerland was determined to include that issue in its political priorities, particularly those relating to its humanitarian and development activities.

50. **Mr. Buff** (Observer for the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC)) said that displacement was often the result of violations of international humanitarian law, including deliberate attacks on civilians. It inflicted immense suffering and hardship on the families caught up in hostilities. Internally displaced persons (IDPs) needed urgent assistance because they were unable to rely on their usual support mechanisms. However, assistance also needed to be provided to those who had not been able to flee conflicts and had remained in their homes. Displacement required diverse and innovative solutions because it took many forms and could involve individuals or whole communities.

51. ICRC had a legal mandate from the international community to protect IDPs and provide them with assistance when they were victims of armed conflicts. However, it also welcomed the increase in the number and diversity of humanitarian actors protecting and assisting IDPs. Two main challenges faced those actors: first, the need to understand the increasingly diverse and complex environments; and secondly, the need to deliver a response that effectively addressed the needs of the affected populations.

52. There was a long tradition of cooperation between ICRC and the United Nations system,

especially UNHCR. In addition, ICRC was responsible for overseeing and coordinating the international relief operations of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, which together had provided assistance to 4.1 million displaced persons and returnees in 2007. In addition to drafting a policy on internal displacement for the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, ICRC had developed strategies aimed at coordinating its response with the responses of other actors to situations of internal displacement.

53. **Mr. Dall'Oglio** (Observer for the International Organization for Migration (IOM)) said that traditional notions of "voluntary" and "forced" migration must be seen in the context of mobility resulting from a broader range of interlinked economic, political and environmental factors. The main challenge facing the international community was how to successfully and humanely manage migration while ensuring international protection for refugees.

54. IOM had continued to develop its cooperation with the United Nations system in 2008. For example, in the Gulf of Eden, UNHCR and IOM had jointly established the Mixed Migration Task Force with the active participation of the United Nations system and key non-governmental organizations. Building on the lessons learned from that first regional meeting, IOM and UNHCR were planning the next regional migration regional workshop, to be held in Dakar in November 2008, and would be increasing their cooperation in the field.

55. IOM and UNHCR had also developed their cooperation at the central and field levels in providing assistance to IDPs and had developed an effective joint approach whereby IOM performed the role of global cluster lead for camp coordination and management in IDP situations resulting from natural disasters, and UNHCR took the lead in situations of conflict-induced displacement. In the light of its research on the nexus between climate change, environmental degradation and population movements, IOM had offered to host a number of workshops among the concerned humanitarian agencies to consider terminology, typologies and operational gaps. Finally, it was important not to lose sight of the sixty years that IOM and UNHCR had worked together productively and successfully on third country resettlement and voluntary repatriation. IOM remained committed to ensure that it had the capacity to assist refugees and at the same time to explore new ways of addressing changing demands.

56. **Mr. Schulz** (Observer for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC)) said that following the 30th International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent, held in November 2007, IFRC had undertaken to develop a global policy on migration for its national societies that would enhance their provision of assistance and protection to migrants, including asylum-seekers and refugees. National societies made a vital contribution to UNHCR through their assessment of the needs of migrants at the local level. The global network of volunteers and national societies had reported that the global economic crisis had affected not only migrants in the host countries but also the family members of those migrants in their countries of origin who depended on remittances. They had also reported that women migrants had been hardest hit by the global crisis.

57. The national societies also had an important humanitarian role to play in assisting all migrants, irrespective of their legal status. Notwithstanding, IFRC agreed with the High Commissioner's concern about the increasing difficulties for asylum-seekers to claim asylum, especially when they were part of mixed population movements. Complementarity and partnership were essential tools for targeting the needs and vulnerabilities of migrants because of cross-cutting protection issues. For example, xenophobia often put foreigners at risk of discriminatory administrative practices, exploitation in the labour market, human trafficking and other abuses. IFRC therefore welcomed the efforts by the United Nations since 2005 to strengthen structures and assign responsibilities for clusters of humanitarian action, including for protection.

58. **Mr. Ould Hadrami** (Mauritania) said that his Government was working with UNHCR to meet the requirements of the international agreements to which it was party and to incorporate them into its national legislation. It aimed to improve the assistance that it provided to refugees, increase cooperation between Government authorities and UNHCR, and enhance civil society participation. Mauritania had decided to assist the return of refugees from Senegal and Mali, and that process was continuing with the assistance of UNHCR. To that end, it had signed an agreement for

the return of refugees from Senegal and had established procedures to allow them to return with dignity.

59. **Ms. Blic** (France), speaking in exercise of the right of reply with respect to the statement made by the representative of the Sudan at the previous meeting, said that her Government expected a radical and immediate change in the policies of the Government of the Sudan concerning Darfur. First, the Sudan must cooperate with the International Court of Justice and implement the decisions taken concerning Ahmad Harun and Ali Kushayb. It must also take all necessary steps to resolve the crisis in Darfur, including by facilitating a cessation of the hostilities, allowing access by humanitarian workers to civilians, facilitating the deployment of the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur, stepping up efforts to find a political solution and re-establishing normal relations with Chad. France still hoped that Abdulwahid el Nour would take part in the peace negotiations and supported unconditionally the work of Djibril Yipènè Bassolé in finding a political solution to the crisis in Darfur.

The meeting rose at 12.30 p.m.